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# **Jean Lafitte** *News Release*

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## Fact Sheet: Barataria Preserve Damage from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

- Trails – all trails are open except the Palmetto Trail, which was severely damaged by uprooted trees and high water.
- Buildings – most sustained roof damage; all are now open and completely functional.
- Waterways – most waterways are cleared with the exception of Upper Kenta Canal, Bayou Coquille, and certain stretches along Bayou des Familles.
- Visitor Services – completely restored.
- Wildlife – Most likely a small number of animals were killed during the storm. Of greater concern is the stress caused by the lack of food, nesting sites, and cover. It is unclear what long-term effects the storm will have on wildlife though certainly animal communities will change to follow shifts in plant communities. The biggest effect may be the reduced number of forest-dwelling birds like warblers that live in areas with mature trees. Post-hurricane observations revealed that numbers of resident landbirds (as opposed to marine birds) are very low, especially in areas where the forest canopy was destroyed and vegetation was stripped. Shortly after the storm, wading birds such as herons and ibises were seen throughout the swamp and marsh.
- Plants – current damage assessments estimate 60 percent of the preserve's trees were impacted by the storm. Canopy opened by downed trees may result in increased production of wildflowers and other plants that require sun. Wind and water may distribute plant seeds and rooting sections in new locations. However, disturbed areas will be vulnerable to opportunistic non-native species like Chinese tallow trees. Specialized National Park Service teams and volunteer groups have mobilized to kill Chinese tallow trees and protect native ecosystem.
- Environment – high winds and wave energy resulted in extensive shoreline loss. Parts of Lake Salvador's shoreline retreated about 200 feet, the equivalent of ten years of annual erosion. Sections of marsh were ripped apart and are now open water; other sections were folded like an accordion. A four-to-six-foot saltwater storm surge penetrated freshwater floating marshes. Salinity more than tripled compared to measurements made earlier in the summer and remained high for about a month due to lack of rain and southerly winds.